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ABSTRACT

The philosophical and educational significance of the present study lies in its attempt to clarify the value and importance of the Socratic legacy for education, in addition to underscoring the difficulty of understanding that legacy. Perspectives on Socrates and his legacy, from Friedrich Nietzsche to contemporary critics, such as Bruce Kimball and Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, provide insight into the ways the Socratic philosophical tradition has influenced contemporary liberal education. Examples from several key Socratic dialogues demonstrate that a misunderstanding of the nature and mission of Socratic teaching is easy to come by. An examination of some current manifestations of Socratic pedagogy leads to the conclusion that there is a widespread use of the term "Socratic" in descriptions of certain types of teaching from kindergarten through law school and that some of these uses derive from a misunderstanding of Socrates. Although many critics have provided enough textual evidence to arouse suspicion about the value of Socratic method in education, there is also evidence that an enduring core of the Socratic tradition is valuable for teaching. This core is found in the larger issues raised in the dialogues: the project of moral inquiry and a searching that cuts across social class. These Socratic issues should be of foremost use, and ultimate worth in present-day teaching. (JD)

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THE USE AND ABUSE OF SOCRATES IN PRESENT DAY TEACHING

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THE USE AND ABUSE OF SOCRATES IN PRESENT DAY TEACHING

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I Introduction

The title of my paper is a deliberate play upon Nietzsche's well-known essay, "The Use and Abuse of History" (1874, 1979). In that work, Nietzsche turned his eye upon his culture to decry what he termed its "malignant historical fever" (p. 4). He believed that a mere studying of the past, particularly by self-absorbed scholars, was not a vital use of historical tradition. Rather, knowledge of the past must instead serve both the present and future (p. 22), and not become merely an abstract item devoid of the context that initially gave it life (pp. 11-12).

Today, a figure from the past serves as an important model and inspiration for current pedagogy. Socrates is used as an example of the master teacher in many contexts, from philosophy classes to law school. There is effort underway to incorporate "Socratic" dialogue into many programs at the precollegiate level (Lipman et. al. 1980; Obermiller 1989). On the surface, then, it would seem that this particular bit of history, brought to life for us through Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes, is alive in

SP 032 586

many current areas of education beyond the careful scholarship of the university classicist or philosopher.

This diversity in the appropriation of Socrates for current pedagogy signifies a vital tradition. Many of these ways Socrates is employed are admirable, and attempt to grapple with the Socratic legacy. Yet, understandings of a "Socratic method" differ widely. There is, for example, disagreement over whether Socrates offered a pedagogical method as that term is understood today. I propose to examine a number of uses of Socratic pedagogy in different contexts in order to show inconsistency among them, particularly in reference to the Platonic Socrates. This study has philosophical and educational significance, for it will help to clarify the value and importance of the Socratic legacy for education, in addition to underscoring the difficulty of an understanding of that legacy.

I shall present an interpretation of the Platonic Socrates by drawing upon original sources and several commentaries. I will deal with the reasons for disagreement and misunderstanding of the legacy of Socrates. Examples from several key "Socratic" dialogues will show that a misunderstanding of the nature and mission of Socratic teaching is easy to come by. I shall then examine a number of current manifestations of Socratic pedagogy. I conclude that there is widespread use of the term "Socratic" in

descriptions of certain types of teaching. Yet, when Socratic teaching is taken to mean everything from dialectical examination of philosophical issues of justice, the good, and the like, (Gray 1988) to the use of questions by a teacher, independent of the subject matter (Kay and Young 1986), there needs to be a clearer understanding of the uses of Socrates in teaching.

II Recent Commentators Tackle Socrates

I shall begin by characterizing briefly some current critical views of Socrates. These views should be taken into account if we are to fully understand and be able to appraise critically the legacy of Socrates. Moreover, such criticism is a key element in a determination of the uses of Socrates for present day teaching.

Several recent commentators on the historical and Platonic Socrates, among them Bruce Kimball (1986), I. F. Stone (1988), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1872, 1956), have been critical of Socrates and his legacy. Stone sees Socrates as enemy of the nascent Greek democracy, while Nietzsche portrays a degenerate destroyer of the heroic legacy of the tragic age of Greece. I shall draw upon these perspectives in my assessment of the legacy of Socrates for education.

Nietzsche, though of at least two minds about Socrates (Dannhauser 1974, especially pp. 269f.), began his career with a

full-force attack upon the Greek. In The Birth of Tragedy (1872, 1956), he rues the emergence of the Socratic spirit of exhaustive analysis that put an end (in Nietzsche's breathless and painfully overbearing view) to the Apollinian-Dionysian mix that spawned the early Greek tragedy. Nietzsche notes that Socrates was incapable of appreciating the earlier tragedians, like Aeschylus, and only attended the plays of Euripides (whom Nietzsche sneeringly calls the first rational tragedian (pp. 81-83)). This insistence upon painstaking analysis signaled for Nietzsche not only the end of the vitality of Greek culture, but also the beginning of an age of men with diminished spirits dependent upon rational analysis rather than myth.

An even more blistering attack than that of Nietzsche comes from the late journalist I. F. Stone (1988). Stone sees Socrates as democracy's enemy, one who believed that the herd of men needed to be firmly ruled (p. 38). This political view, coupled with the belief that knowledge is absolute and unattainable and that virtue and knowledge could not be taught (pp. 63f.) makes it difficult for Stone to see how Socrates could be defended as a teacher or even citizen of Athens. Stone's book has made a splash because he attempted to defend Athenian democracy against Socrates.

Finally, a more measured critique of Socrates's influence can be

found in Bruce Kimball's recent widely discussed book (1986). Kimball points out that the philosophical tradition of Socrates has won out in contemporary liberal education over the oratorical tradition of Cicero. Kimball sees a tension between the pursuit of knowledge on the one hand, and the recognition and maintenance of the importance of historical traditions within learning communities on the other hand. Socrates, and more generally philosophy too, was parasitic upon Greek culture. Yet, Kimball's discussion has crucial educational import, for it challenges us to find ways to keep alive the Socratic spirit, however corrosive or parasitic it may try to be, while also maintaining an appreciation and a cultivation of tradition and custom as advocated in the Ciceronian oratorical view. This challenge was of course Nietzsche's own too, made clear in The Use and Abuse of History. We shall keep this theme from Kimball and Nietzsche in mind, in addition to Stone's views, as we examine contemporary Socratic pedagogy and give our final assessment of this and other manifestations of Socrates's legacy.

Such views were not voiced specifically apropos of education; yet they have educational import. This import is evident in a recent heated published exchange between Richard Paul and Louis Goldman concerning the role of Socratic inquiry in the schools (Goldman 1984; Paul 1984). Goldman believes that Socratic questioning can be dangerous if begun too early: "A proper education of the

young must begin with a firm grounding in the nature and values of our culture" (p. 60; cf. Nietzsche 1872, 1956; Beatty 1984; Kimball 1986). He notes that Plato advocated dialectics only after a long preparatory education. Socratic questioning can become dynamite in the wrong hands, and we only approximate his method (p. 62). Goldman recommends that we attend to traditional (Ciceronian, in Kimball's term) education for the young, and not encourage too early an introduction to dialectics.

Richard Paul, perhaps the most well-known advocate of critical thinking in the schools, disagrees with Goldman. He believes that we must foster the habit of thinking critically at the same time and in tandem with an appreciation of culture. He takes up the challenge offered by Kimball and others; to borrow Kimball's terms, Paul believes that a synthesis of Socratic inquiry and Ciceronian traditionalism should be fostered. Paul goes further by making a claim common to Matthews (1980) and Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan (1980): thinking philosophically, of which Socratic inquiry is a central element, occurs naturally in children. Infectious curiosity manifested in childlike wonder and the persistent questioning that attends such wonder should be harnessed by a sensitive teacher to further the appreciation of cultural traditions and other educational aims.

III Socrates as Teacher: A Reexamination

These perspectives, from Nietzsche to current debates in the area of critical thinking, are extended in recent scholarship by prominent philosophers of education. Perhaps the most sustained attempt to grapple with the legacy of Socrates for pedagogy has been made by Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon and her colleagues at the University of Chicago (Hansen 1988; Haroutunian and Jackson 1986; Haroutunian-Gordon 1987, 1988, 1989).

Through a close reading of several of the Socratic dialogues, particularly the Gorgias, Meno, Philebus, and Protagoras, she challenges the notion of a "Socratic method." For instance, Haroutunian-Gordon points out Socratic inconsistencies that call into question use of the term "Socratic method." She makes a further claim that the reason Socrates does not follow a prescribed formal method is that he is in what educational researchers now call an "ill-structured teaching situation." Following a predetermined dialectical blueprint will not suffice for the way that a discussion may have gone "awry" (Haroutunian-Gordon 1988, p. 231). In such situations, the teaching depends on the content of the conversation, and how nuance and shadings of meaning issue forth their own structure. Certainly many post-Wittgensteinian philosophers, as diverse as Grice and Gadamer, have explored this phenomenon long known to writers of imaginative literature.

Elsewhere, by way of showing again the inadequacy of a formal description of teaching, Haroutunian-Gordon attempts to "identify pedagogical aims" (1987, pp. 119f.) by giving four suggestions about what Socrates's might be: 1) bring interlocutors to aporia; 2) pursue truth about fundamental questions; 3) teach proper intellectual habits; 4) modify the moral principles of the interlocutors. Though Socrates may advocate the philosophical life via these aims according to Haroutunian-Gordon, he does not demand that others follow this life, nor are these purported aims necessarily relevant to the "task of explaining why he did what he did in the dialogues" (1987, p. 129). Haroutunian-Gordon's arguments are important, if only for undermining an easy mimicry of Plato's Socrates in one's pedagogy.

IV Socratic Pedagogy in the Meno

The Socratic legacy offered up by Haroutunian-Gordon and her colleagues, along with the views discussed in Part Two, make it difficult to see how Socrates has become such a pervasive pedagogical model. He says repeatedly that he is not a teacher, and then seems almost intent on proving that claim by irony, inconsistent action, and an occasional long-winded speech, as at the end of the Gorgias. Yet, perhaps we can turn to one place where many have looked when they speak of Socratic teaching: the Meno. An old man drawing geometric figures in the sand with the

young slave boy is a powerful image of what many believe Socratic teaching to be.

Nevertheless, we must be careful with this seemingly transparent instance of pedagogy. Though an important theme of the dialogue comes when Socrates extracts the distinction between knowledge and true opinion through coaxing and vivid imagery, his supposed drawing out of the recollected geometric wisdom from the slave boy is troublesome as a display of pedagogy. Socrates begins his lesson by putting words in the mouth of the slave boy (82B f.). Is this a convincing display of pedagogy? Leaving aside the blatant (to my eyes at least) problems of power and dominance of an elderly Greek citizen teaching a slave boy, this example of teaching has always left me cold. It is not apparent at all that teaching has occurred (though it is a convincing display of inference (cf. Allen 1959)). It is not made clear in the dialogue that the slave boy is somehow capable of using his knowledge. He appears more like a sounding board for Socrates, who here seems to be just a mouthpiece for the theories of recollection (anamnesis) and innate knowledge (Jones 1990).

V The Meno as Inspiration

Though the Meno may be troublesome as pedagogy, it has provided pedagogical inspiration to many teachers. The famous passage

(80A-B) where Meno chides Socrates for being like the electric ray (or torpedo) that delivers perplexing questions has provided Donald Thomas (1985) with a way to teach so that students will go out on their own and dig under the surface. In a brief and thoughtful essay, Thomas describes an episode in his early secondary school teaching career when he dramatically presented a sermon by the Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards for his students. Thomas wanted to stun his students into a perplexity that might be uncomfortable, much as Socrates makes Meno uncomfortable with his persistent questions. He wanted them to see Edwards come alive so that these contemporary students would not forget the Puritan's images. The "torpedo's touch" was there, much to the chagrin of a team of behaviorally oriented evaluators in the back of the room.

Today, many years after this incident, Thomas still uses the "torpedo's touch" in his pedagogical arsenal. Like Socrates, he often begins with pleasantries and surface talk, waiting for the right moment to deliver the stark and perplexing questions that may provoke wonder coupled with a realization of ignorance in his students (p. 222). Yet, Thomas's essay is too brief for him to give us examples of his questions, and to recreate a number of different pedagogical scenarios. Furthermore, we would want to know just <u>how</u> his questions were akin to those of Socrates beyond being perplexing and intellectually numbing.

VI Missing the Spirit

While Thomas has taken inspiration from Socrates in his classroom practice, others attempt to devise teaching strategies devoid of such spirit. I shall argue that some of the most flagrant "abuses" associated with using Socrates as a pedagogic model come when superficial aspects of the Platonic Socrates are used uncritically as pedagogic strategies.

Fishman (1985) notes several of these "misconceptions." The Socratic method is often seen and used today as an open-ended question and answer process (p. 185). Kay and Young (1986) equate Socratic teaching with asking more questions in the classroom and with the encouragement of students to become independent and autonomous thinkers. They compare Socratic questioning with a current teaching strategy called "ReQuest," developed by the educationist Anthony Manzo. No mention of content or aim of the questions is given by Kay and Young; apparently to them it seems sufficient that the teacher is a full-time questioner in order to be dubbed Socratic.

VII Beyond Inspiration: Current Socratic Teaching

In what follows, I shall examine a number of examples of Socratic teaching strategies that have gone beyond either drawing inspiration from the dialogues or missing that inspiration. A weakness in Thomas's approach was that a pedagogical strategy,

rich with examples, was not spelled out in his brief essay. On the other hand, if an understanding of the Socratic mission is absent, we may be led to the lifting and distorting of formal qualities of Socratic practice in our teaching. I shall examine the teaching of Vivian Gussin Paley of the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago along with another Chicago Socratic practitioner, Mortimer Adler.

Vivian Paley, a veteran elementary school teacher and recipient of a MacArthur award, tells us of numbness of a different kind from that of Thomas's "torpedo's touch." She describes candidly her lack of interest and enjoyment in her early years of teaching (1986). She happened to observed a colleague using the "old Socratic method" (p. 123) she too had once used as a Great Books discussion leader. Then she began to realize how excited she was about the process of thinking going on in the minds of her students. She now affirms the place of this process over any other outcome, or product, in her teaching (1990). Children are not interested in answers, she claims, but are fascinated by process (1990; cf. Matthews, 1980).

The impetus for her renewed interest and curiosity about her own teaching came from the hard realization that she did not know the answers to the questions that her young charges were posing. She was thus forced to keep asking relevant questions, based not on

her own preconceptions, but rather on how the child was thinking about a topic (1990; 1986, p. 124). The classroom drama, in which her students enacted imaginative stories of their own construction, became for her "a paper chain of magical imaginings mixed with some solid facts" (1986, p. 123). This paper chain offered Paley abundant opportunities for her version of Socratic probing.

Yet Paley the teacher goes beyond a Socratic pose in the classroom. She turns the questioning reflexively upon herself and her own thinking with a "specific tool" (1990) she has used for years: the tape recorder. Paley tapes daily ninety minutes of her students' stories and the accompanying dialogue (1990). The tape recorder, with its "unrelenting fidelity" (1986, p. 123) has trained her to listen precisely to what the children say. In transcribing the taped dialogue, large chunks of which appear in her books, Paley has the opportunity to review all that went on in the classroom. Using what she calls an "internalized Socratic method" (Obermiller 1986, p. 19), she takes herself to task in preparation for her writing, asking herself questions like "why did I ignore that question?" or "is that something I could have taken up with him?" (1990).

For Paley, this activity is part of the "intellectual game of teaching" (1990). Interacting with preschoolers as they play

with blocks is not merely play, but also the process of thinking and intellectual inquiry. Her exhausting teaching, taping, and transcribing regimen is an important living manifestation of the Socratic notion of the worth of the examined life. This element of reflexive inquiry aimed at self-knowledge, difficult to achieve, is absent from such purported Socratic teaching advocated by practitioners like Kay and Young.

Paley's methods have attracted attention and acclaim. Yet an even more widespread version of Socratic teaching is espoused by Mortimer Adler and his supporters (Adler 1982; Sizer 1984; Weiss 1987; Gray 1988). Adler's Paideia Proposal (1982) is one of the key documents of the 1980's school reform movement. In this brief work he advocates three interrelated ways of learning (p. 23) that should be followed by all students regardless of age or ability: 1) the acquisition of knowledge by lectures, memorization, and other means; 2) the development of intellectual skills, through coaching; 3) the enlargement of understanding through Socratic discussion of ideas and texts.

However, the overwhelming majority of the focus given in the implementation of the Paideia Proposal, both by the Paideia Associates, a select group of advocates and teacher-trainers, and by the new National Center for the Paideia Program (NCPP) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been on the

third type of learning, the Socratic seminar (cf. Sizer 1984, Chapter 5; Gray 1988). Let us turn to a discussion of Adler's version of Socratic pedagogy.

Adler's description of seminar pedagogy is deceptively simple: a "discussion in which students both ask and answer questions" (1982, p. 53). One of his close associates, the director of NCPP, Patricia Weiss, defines a seminar as:

"(an) educationally oriented discussion in which ideas, issues, or principles are examined...

The main teaching method used in seminars is one of questioning and examining responses. This style of teaching is often referred to as Socratic teaching, named after Socrates who used questions in his <u>teaching</u> of the youth of Athens in 400 BC" (1987, p. 1; emphasis added).

Weiss then describes the three tasks of the seminar leader proposed by Adler: " 1) to ask a series of questions, 2) to examine the answers by trying to draw out the reasons for them, or their implications, 3) to engage the participants in a two-way talk with one another when views appear to be in conflict" (p. 1). I can recognize Socrates in one and two, though I cannot recall anywhere in the dialogues where Socrates encourages his

interlocutors to debate each other. Rather, these interlocutors are more likely to give monosyllabic replies to Socrates's withering questions, prompting more than one reader to wonder just how dialogic these accounts were intended to be.

One the other hand, though this Adlerian technique may not be true to the Platonic Socrates, might it be seen as a commendable development of Socratic practice? After all it does seem odd (until you consider Plato's own agenda for his created characters) that these interlocutors, many of whom are absurdly laconic, do not argue amongst themselves. Sadly, though, at least in my repeated observation of seminars led by Adler himself and some of his associates, this third task of a seminar leader is as rarely practiced today as it might have been in ancient Athens.

Let us now turn to a closer examination of how Weiss practices Socratic teaching. In her manual that accompanies the videotapes of Adler leading seminars for high school students (1987), Weiss provides a detailed discussion of how to structure a seminar. She suggests that the teacher first set an atmosphere that will allow students to feel at ease in asking questions. This may include putting to one side any expertises students may bring to the text at hand (Gray 1988) so that general discussion among (near) equals may be established. Weiss begins her classes with

a variety of nonthreatening questioning techniques (e.g., round robin, voting, random call on whether students like or dislike Socrates are typical in her teaching of the Apology).

Once enough pedagogical lubricant has been applied, Weiss may move to a discussion of whether Socrates is a teacher, the charges made against him in the Apology, or whether he is guilty or innocent. Like Haroutunian-Gordon (1988), Weiss acknowledges the "ill-structured teaching situation" through this emphasis upon making teachers aware of the importance of being prepared to ask unscripted follow-up questions (Weiss 1987, p. 2). These practices are all commendable, but they rest upon a crucial assumption, made clear by another Paideia associate, Dennis Gray. Even as Gray asserts that Socrates had no syllabus, he declares that the purpose of Socratic teaching is to focus always on texts, with even the opening question based upon a close study of the text at hand (1988).

The changes we moderns have made in the name of Socrates could not be clearer. Socrates, of course, did not use a common reading around a seminar table. Furthermore, this assertion by Gray makes apparent another related assumption of the Paideia method, namely that great works will contain great ideas.

VIII The Socratic Spirit: The Dark Side of a Legend

The image of Socratic teaching presented above has been mixed. Socrates can be difficult and disarming. Yet we educators are often intent upon seeing Socrates in the warm glow of history as the one who began humanistic inquiry. In this section, I shall return to an unromantic view of Socrates that I have so far presented through other writers like Stone and Nietzsche.

I shall suggest the importance of a "Socratic spirit" by turning to some first-hand accounts of legal pedagogy, and the use of the "Socratic method" in law schools. In spite of Adler's inroads into the nation's schools, the popular image of Socratic teaching often comes from the so-called "Socratic method" used in law schools. Former colleagues from graduate school who hold the doctoral degree in philosophy and have also studied law have given me some unique insights into the practice of the "Socratic method" in law classes.

Many of us have never entered a law class, but we feel that we know what goes on there. We have seen John Houseman's portrayal of Professor Kingsfield in the film and television show, "The Paper Chase." Houseman's depiction of an unforgiving taskmaster asking his often timid students withering questions is the beginning and the end of legal pedagogy for most of us, and for our perceptions on how Socrates is used in legal teaching. In

consulting several colleagues who have experienced legal pedagogy, I was able to deepen my understanding of Socratic legal teaching beyond this popular image.

Peter Suber, an associate professor of philosophy at Earlham College, holds both the PhD and JD degrees from Northwestern University. His description of a law class is truly harrowing: "Incorrect answers, undue delays in answering, or overt signs of nervousness are punished with sardonic jibes or withering glances. The atmosphere is humiliation; the punishment is humiliation...The consensus among students is that the method is not 'educational' in any traditional sense. It does not help one learn cases or legal reasoning. It is sadistic" (1990). Suber sees ample evidence in the dialogues to think that Socrates behaved similarly. Furthermore, Suber believes that the so-called legal Socratic method is used in different ways in law schools of different levels of prestige (1990). In the most prestigious category, students behave in the "Paper Chase" fashion, reciting the facts and attendant arguments while standing and attempting to answer the professor's questions.

On the other hand, Suber notes, what he calls second echelon schools and below may be places where the method is more humane. Here there may be more emphasis upon reasoning and thinking rather than performance. Unlike the first instance cited, this

gentler use of the method may in fact emphasize "respond(ing) to well-crafted counterfactuals again and again" (1990) in an atmosphere of support and trust.

Another former colleague, Mark Olson, also holds the doctoral degree in philosophy from Northwestern University and is completing a JD at Boalt Hall of the University of California at Berkeley. Olson takes a different tack in discussing his experience. He begins by offering a definition of what he carefully calls the "legal Socratic method:"

"(It) employs the use of actual recorded court cases to teach students the rules of law and their application and justification (whether clear or not, whether persuasive or not), through the instructor's use of a series of hypotheticals based on the main case and through the students' discussion of the case and the hypotheticals. Its successful use and reception calls for skill and wit" (1990).

Olson reminds us of other factors that I agree are crucial to the understanding of the legacy of Socrates for pedagogy. The Socratic method evolved in law training as a "historical formation, which, in its present form presupposed the existence of a legal casebook" (1990). Above all for Olson, the method is not a technique; when it is so practiced it is characteristic of

inept instructors. In those classes students are not probed, but are allowed to give "unreflective (kneejerk) responses to complex social issues" (1990).

One of my deep seated and cherished beliefs has again been questioned by this knowledge. I want to believe, along with Adler, Fishman, and other sanguine educators, that Socratic teaching is a means to search for truth. I still muse in uncritical moments about a Socrates, beneficent and maligned, leading the youth of Athens on the golden path of instruction. It is not a prominent part of the lore of Socratic pedagogy so understood today, even in graduate programs in philosophy, that there is a darker side of this practice as argued by Stone and Nietzsche, and brought to the fore here in a different way by Suber and Olson. Stone's criticism of Socrates is too recent; besides, he built his reputation as the consummate outsider journalist who only taught himself Greek in his waning years. Thus he does not belong to the anointed academic club of classical scholarship. Nietzsche, though a classical scholar, is usually dismissed as a German at best and a raving crank at worst, particularly when it comes to his views on Socrates.

Yet, this "darker" side of Socrates must be preserved, as I shall contend in the following section, if we are to truly "use" and not "abuse" Socrates in present day teaching. Suber's

description of a harrowing law class may be an extreme version of such practice. The "sadistic" querying that may go on in higher echelon law schools may be true to Socrates in one sense; he was relentless and oftentimes unpleasant. But we must ask to what end these displays are headed. In the following section, I shall seek to show that we must preserve the wily, irascible Socrates most of us have come to love (or hate) at the same time as we preserve the core of his mission.

IX Conclusion: Determining the Use and Abuse of Socrates

We have seen how Socrates is part of many classroom situations, from Paley's kindergarten on up to law school. Which of these are legitimate uses of Socrates and which are abusive? To determine such appraisals, I believe we must use several standards. Abuse of Socrates does not necessarily come, as might be first thought, when the Socratic "victim" is mischievously questioned and pierced with sardonic barbs. Abuse may come rather more from well-meaning educators who, perhaps in the joy of discovering a technique that is liberating and aims toward thinking, emasculate Socrates. How could Socrates be so diminished?

First, we may forget that Socrates at his best was attempting to uncover self-knowledge and to encourage others to do so too. He followed his "daemon" and eschewed followers. As both Stone and

Suber underscore, Socrates was devious and crafty. These factors must lie at the core of any interpretation of Socrates for present day teaching. If we apply (and I use this term deliberately) a Socratic method to any topic, this strategy does not necessarily guarantee that self-knowledge will occur. Self-knowledge is a difficult concept, as the irony used by a Socrates and a Kierkegaard seem to suggest. Yet to abandon this tough road and to forget the occasionally unsavory aspects of Socrates is to forsake the Socratic spirit, and thus to abuse the legacy of Socrates for education.

A related abuse of Socrates in present day teaching comes when we believe uncritically that Socrates himself was a teacher. The word teacher makes most of us who are in the "education business" think of someone who may devise and implement a curricular rationale. If Socrates was indeed a teacher, then he must have had a specific pedagogy and a specific set of topics that can be learned by others, the reasoning goes. Haroutunian-Gordon and Hansen, among others, have raised enough doubts about such inferences. But this has not deterred other educators from advocating what they suppose are teachable strategies and curricular objectives derived from Plato's character. While Mortimer Adler certainly uses irony and humiliation in a manner worthy of Socrates, it is not clear that those trained in his methods have the confidence or the temperament to use these

ploys. I have witnessed well-intentioned teachers trained under Adler leading supposedly "Socratic" discussions without suggesting even a hint of irony or challenge (cf. Adler 1990). Perhaps a good number of teachers find themselves incapable of being "mischievous, disingenuous, and cunning, and occasionally even devious" (Suber 1990) in the way that Plato's Socrates was. Furthermore, the topics explored by Socrates (cf. Adler's "great ideas") do not form a prominent part of current curricular rationale or practice.

Conflicts between Socratic teaching and other aims of education are also apparent and disturbing. Educators are urged to be supportive, to nurture their students, many of whom are currently "at-risk." Teachers must often serve as surrogate parents to students from dysfunctional families. It is thus difficult and perhaps even at cross purposes to use a pedagogical method and encourage the cultivation of self-knowledge with such students.

Is there an enduring core of the Socratic legacy for teaching ? Haroutunian-Gordon and others have given enough textual evidence in order for us to be suspicious of thinking that Socrates was a teacher in any conventional or current sense of that term. Other commentators as diverse as Nietzsche, I.F. Stone, Bruce Kimball, and Louis Goldman have called attention to the corrosive and even dangerous qualities of Socratic inquiry. Yet why does Socrates

continue to leave the torpedo's deep marks upon most anyone who reads the dialogues, and on those of us who are inspired to model his actions in our own teaching?

The Socrates of Plato's dialogues continually cuts past areas of knowledge apprehended by either episteme or phronesis. Socrates can make us feel that the failure to sustain a thesis or find a definition is not just a defeat of intelligence, but rather a moral disaster (Vlastos 1971, 1980, p. 6). Socrates may not have given us a simple "method" that we can apply to any topic, and it may be difficult to mimic Socrates in today's schools. Yet the larger issues raised in the dialogues must not be ignored. The care of the soul, the project of moral inquiry, and a searching that cuts across social class should be the first and foremost use, and ultimate worth, of Socrates for present-day teaching (Vlastos 1971, 1980; cf. Gadamer 1986; Seeskin 1987; Johnson 1989).

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